

Framework for Inter Faith Dialogue in Al-Sharī'a Al- Islāmiyyah الشريعة الإسلامية (PART I)

By:

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Islam, being a unique and youngest in world religions has related itself to the most of the pre-Islamic religions. Islam's recognition of other religions as legitimate religions is essence of Islamic beliefs, which is reflected in the rulings of al-Sharī'a al-Islāmiyyah الشريعة الإسلامية. Its relations with other religions are indicating the world view of Islam. al-Sharī'a's view of God, the reality of man and his place in the universal, importance of religious diversity, legislation regarding non-Muslims are providing sufficient theological and legal grounds on which Muslims are regulating their relations with the followers of other religions. Islam's relations with Judaism, Christianity and Sabaeism were crystallized first by God through direct revelation in al-Qur'an. The actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), on the bases of divine guidance, further enhanced

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Muslims' capacity to work with them. During his life time Holy Prophet entered into agreements with Christians and Jews and at a time went to include them into Muslim Ummah *مسلم أمة*. The Prophet's companions extended this status of official recognition to the Zoroastrains at the time of conquered of Persia. This recognition was extended to Hinduism and Buddhism by the Muslim Jurist following the conquest of the lower region of the Indus valley.

This recognition of almost all pre-Islamic divine religions is inbuilt in commandments of al-Sharī'a al-Islāmīya *الشريعة الإسلامية*. The rulings of shariya are regulating the relations of Muslims with others from the early period of Islam till today. In each period of Islamic history during peace and war Muslims were very successfully able to create interfaith tolerance and co-existence. The Muslim's communication with non-Muslims was also conducted on the bases of these rulings. In spite of political clashes and wars between Muslims and others these rulings of shariya remain in changeable and sustainable because it is based on basic sources of Islam i.e. al-Quran and Sunnah.

In contemporary world due to the spread of idea of clash of civilizations and increasing conflicts between followers of different religious traditions it became inevitable to search way forward for interfaith understanding. The only way to crate interfaith understanding and co-existence is dialogue. Contemporary movement of interfaith dialogue was initially started by the Roman Catholic Christians. Later on adherents of other religions including Islam started contributing in it. Presently Muslims have taken this

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challenge very seriously and many contemporary scholars such as Ismā'īl Rā'jī al Fārūqī, Syed Hussein Nasr, Prof. Khursheed Ahmed, Muhammad al-Tālbī and Muhammad Fateullah Gülen are trying to revive original Islamic teachings regarding inter faith relations. The contribution of these scholars is unique and addressing almost all important issues of interfaith relations including interfaith dialogue. In the light of rulings of al-Sharī'a al-Islāmīya, contemporary Muslim scholars are trying to suggest framework for interfaith dialogue so that Muslims can effectively contribute in it while considering it as a tool of peace among world religions. The aim of this paper is to identify the main ingredients of Islamic framework of interfaith dialogue while analyzing the contemporary thoughts on the bases of mainstream Islamic teachings.

The paper proceeds with the short introduction about the life and work of Muhammad Feteullah Gülen. Then importance of religious pluralism in interfaith dependence and thought's of Gülen regarding it have been elaborated. Gülen is establishing interfaith dependence on normative ethics and values which are common essence of humanity. This has been elaborated in third part of this paper. Gülen suggests dialogue and tolerance as strategies for creating understanding and culture of appreciations among the followers of world religions. This has been discussed in forth part of this study. In conclusion of this paper importance of Gülen' s thoughts regarding inter religious dependence for Muslims has been identified so that Muslims can actively and positively contribute for peace among.

I-Introduction and Importance of Interfaith Dialogue

Definition of dialogue

The term dialogue has been explained by various ways. Its literal, religious philosophical and anthropological dimensions have received attention of the researchers. As a noun it has been derived from the Greek verb *διαλεγομαι* which in philosophical term refers to an action through which we can reach the *Λογος* or the idea. In Socrates *διαλεγομαι* takes the form of question and answer, which is to carry a conversation direct toward reaching a decision or settlement.¹ The English verb 'to confer' is very close to this meaning in its basic use such as 'to give', 'to meet', 'to exchange views' or 'to negotiate'. In Plato and Aristotle the meaning remains generally the same, with the emphasis on 'treating' something, or 'conferring'. In philo, dialogue means nothing more than 'conversation' or 'speech' and only once does it meant 'disputation.'²

If applied in a religious context, the term *Λογος* could also refer to the 'divine mind' or 'word.' In its New

¹-Gottlob Schrenk, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Ed.) Gergard friedrich et al, (trans.) Geoffrey Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI, WM.B.Eermans Publishing Company, 1974), p.2/93.

²-Simon Harunblower and Antony Spawforth (edi.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (New York, Oxford University Press, 3rd Edition, 1996), p.462; Milko Youroukov, 'Dialogue Between Religious Traditions as a Barrier against cases of Extreme Religious Fundamentalism,' in Plamen Makariev (ed.), *Islam and Christian Cultures: Conflict or Dialogue* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001), p.59, 75.

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Testament usage διαλεγομαι' was the act of exercising one's power of argument with a view of reaching the meaning of the world of God: the logos revealed in scripture through revelation. If revelations were defined in terms of 'comprehensive declaration of the divine will, which sets all life in the divine truth,'¹ than the word 'dialogue' would have a different connotation in religion than in philosophy. Instead of reasoning with a view of reaching the truth meaning that would suggest the philosophical usage of 'dialogue,' its religious use would imply the idea of reasoning upon the reality given divine truth. It is in this sense of the word 'reasoning' that the verb is used in Acts 17:2 where Paul is said to reason with the Jews from the Scriptures for three Sabbaths. The same meaning of διαλεγομαι' is implied in acts 17:17; 18:4,19; 24; 12. The following text of Acts better characterizes this usage: 'Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the market place daily with those who happened to be there.'²

Vjekoslav Bajsic draws attention to the anthropological dimension of this term. He says that dialogue has the power of forming togetherness. By attributing importance to the partner from the beginning, I change my problems and his problems into our problems. Certain interests reveal themselves as 'our' interests while community is being created through common action. Therefore one may define dialogue as a conversation of man with man about the essential

¹- Gottlob Schrenk, op. cit., p.94.

²- Acts 17:17.

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matters of man for sake of man. He also stresses on the need of establishing positive meaning of dialogue because problems of dialogue are at the same time problems of humanization in the broadest sense of the world. Any objection to dialogue on grounds of a principle, before undertaking the dialogue, represents an inadequate anthropology and rests on ideological foundations.¹ Scholars, involved in interfaith dialogue, distinguish it from debate in which representatives of each religious tradition try to prove that the position of their communication is right and others wrong'.² Swidler analyses these definitions and concludes it as 'a conversation between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow'.³

Muslims' Definitions of Dialogue

Muslims used different terminologies such as *al jadl* الجدل, *al mufawadhat* المفاوضة, *al hīwar* الحوار *al mūhajjah* محاجة, and *al hādith* for the notion of dialogue. The base of these terminologies is its use in Qūr'an and Sūnnah of Prophet Muhammad. The terminology '*Al Jadl*'

¹-Vjekoslav Bajsic, 'The Significance and problems of Dialogue Today,' *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 9, (1972), p.36.

²-Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion,(ed.) Paul Kenin Meagher, Sister Consudo SSJ,etc. (Washington ,D.C., Corpus Publications.19780,vol.F-N,p.1820.

³-Leonard Swidler, 'The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue,' *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 20, (1983), p.1.

الجدل is used on several occasions in Qūr'an in the meaning of argumentation,¹ which held between different previous prophets and their nations.²

Qura'an text:

﴿هَآ أَنتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ جَادَلْتُمْ عَنْهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فَمَنْ يُجَادِلُ اللَّهَ عَنْهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَمْ مَنْ يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلًا﴾
﴿قَالُوا يَا نُوحُ قَدْ جَادَلْتَنَا فَأَكْثَرْتَ جِدَالَنَا فَأْتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ﴾
﴿كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَالْأَحْزَابُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ وَهَمَّتْ كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ بِرَسُولِهِمْ لِيَأْخُذُوهُ وَجَادَلُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ الْحَقَّ فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عِقَابِ﴾
﴿وَإِنْ جَادَلُوكَ فَقُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾
﴿وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

Muslim jurists usually use the term *al mufawadhat* for describing negotiation in trade matters. One kind of business, approved by shari'ah, is also named *shirkat al mufawadhat*, in which each party enters as a

¹- Ibn Manzoor, *Lisān Al Arab*, (ed.) Yousaf al khiyat (Beirut, Dar Al Jil wa dar Lisan al Arab, 1988), p. 1/720.

²- See Al Qur'an 4:109; 11:32; 40:5; 22:68; 29:46.

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result of successful trade negotiation.¹ This terminology is described as 'exchange of views of negotiators, on the bases of particular rules, for reaching on an agreements'.² This terminology is preferably used in the meanings of political negotiation.³ The term *a/ hīwar* الحوار⁴ is closer to the contemporary meanings of dialogue. Ibn Manzoor Al-(d.1311), a famous scholar of Arabic language, has defined it as 'conversation between people in which they exchange their views with each other'.⁵ This Arabic terminology is equivalent to the western terminology dialogue⁶ in which conversation is aimed on better understandings between the representatives of different traditions or cultures.

Contemporary Muslim scholars, involved in dialogue between people of different traditions, also try to define dialogue in Islamic context. Tunisian scholar Mohammed Tālbī (1921-) defines dialogue as a state of mind, an atmosphere, an opening, an attitude of friendship or of

¹-Ibn Manzoor, op.cit., p. 4 /1144.

²-Ahmed Raza, *Muajam mattan al lughah* (Beirut, Dar Maktabahat al hiyat, 1959), p.4/468; Wahawah Zuhaily, *Al mufawazat Fil Islam*, Journal Faculty of Islamic Studies, U.A.E, NO.7, 1993, P.32.

³-Proceedings of International Seminar on Negotiation, (Al Riyadh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1993), p.16.

⁴-Al Qūr'an has used different root forms of this terminology on several places, see 18:34,37; 58:1 ; 55:72 ; 56:22.

⁵- Ibn Manzoor, op.cit., p.3/162.

⁶- See George Percy Badger D.C.I, *An English Arabic Lexicon* (London, Kegan Paul & co, 1881), p.235.

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comprehension'.¹He feels Islam much more urgently needs this comprehension.' Islam, he elaborates, has long lived with in 'safe boundaries', but in today's new circumstances it can no longer afford to remain isolated. 'Thus dialogue for Islam', he argues, 'is first and for most a necessary and vital re-establishment of contact with world at large'.² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Iranian scholar settled in U.S.A, calls dialogue 'a very honorable term', especially 'in the west and the philosophical traditions'. The meaning of the term, he points out, in 'Platonic and Socratic' discourse is understood 'as a means of discovering the truth'. But 'as used since the Second world War', in the religious sphere, 'it has come to mean discussing various aspects of religion among followers of each religion with the aim of a better understanding of the two sides',³

The above views of Muslim scholars approve that the contemporary use of terminology dialogue as 'conversation between the representatives of different communications with the aim of developing greater understanding and finding a basis for greater cooperation',⁴ is in accordance with Islam thought.

¹-Mohammed Talbi, 'Islam -Christian Encounter Today: Some Principles', MECC Perspective, No.4/5(July-August 1985) p.10.

²- Mohammed Talbi, 'Islam and Dialogue: Some Reflection on a Current Topic', in R. Rousseau, (ed.), Christianity and Islam: The Struggling Dialogue (Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1985), p.45.

³-Siddiqui Attaullah, 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century',(Macmillan Press Ltd, London ,1997),p.155.

⁴-Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, (Longman group, 1978), p.301-302.

Dialogue and Da'wah

The relationship of Da'wah دعوة with dialogue is an other point needs to be discussed. Contemporary *Muslim* scholars consider Da'wah as evidence of favourable Islamic trend toward dialogue. Prof. Khurshid Ahmed sees it as a part of dialogue, which involves 'knowing, learning, reaching, talking, discussing, and persuading each other'.¹ Nasr defines Da'wah as an opportunity 'to present the message of Islam and the message of tawhid where ever possible'. The condition, in his opinion, is to present Islam 'without coercion'. In relation to Da'wah /mission and dialogue Nasr finds 'some clash between two. In order to have dialogue ', he suggest, one must transcend the trying to convert everyone to your religion'. Rather he prefers to use the term 'witness', and through witness of one's religion 'someone may receive the call of God and embrace Islam. This, he suggests, is a far stronger position for Muslims than any other thing. In Nasr's view, dialogue in wider sense is a part of Da'wah .He suggests that Muslims 'have to reach a level of understanding ...of the doctrine of Tawhid توحيد and the role of Islam in world as a whole'. This he argues,' will provide a wider vision where they will be happy if they have good Christians amidst them who understand them with out becoming Muslims. He believes that today many Muslims have lost the universality of their religion. If Muslims today 'went back to the best of their 'own traditions' then Da'wah would not be understood in the sense of 'bitter enmity

¹- Ataullah Siddiqui, op.cit.,p.125.

against Christianity, Judaism and other religions;’ much of that is political’.¹

II-Prospects of Inter faith Dialogue

There is much agreement today that what all faiths share is more important than their differences. At present there are two extremes in the Western historical narratives. The first implies that, after the end of the cold war, the West will see its values expending all over the world. Francis Fukuyama told this story in ‘The End of the History and the Last Man.’² Samuel Huntington derived from this story his vision of ‘Clash of Civilizations.’³ The both stories are of modernist origin, the first is optimistic about the final worldwide victory of western civilization, and the second is pessimistic about the gradual decline of the West. None of these two points of view have generally been accepted can be accepted and, in the view of Yuri Pochta, ‘we must give ourselves a chance to restore modern world history and to avoid any fatalistic comparison of it.’⁴ Human differences could be considered reason of clashes or it could be treated as a

¹- Ibid.,158-159.

²- Francis Fukuyama, *The End Of History And The Last Man* (London: Hamish Mamilton, 1992.)

³- Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, London, 1996).

⁴- Yuri Pochta, ‘Clash of Civilizations or Restorying Mankind,’ Plamen Makariev (ed.) *Islamic and Christian Cultures: Conflict or Dialogue*, Bulgarian Philosophical Studies (U.S.A The Council for research in Values and Philosophy, 2001), p.107.

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unique characteristic of human life in the context of cultural and religious diversity in which we have to live.

Disagreements and differences of the nations are symbols of diversity and need of conversation emerges from it. Conversation can take place only when there is some disagreement, either of negative kind in which someone knows something and the other does not, or of a positive kind in which there is a difference in thinking and assertion. If there is complete identity of thinking there can be no real conversation but only a confirmation of agreement, reciprocal recitation, and mutual silence or boredom.¹ Dialogical conversation provides opportunity of free exchange of ideas, which can be beneficial to all. Tālbī points out that the primary objective of dialogue is to 'to remove barriers and to increase the amount of good in the world by a free exchange of ideas'. He finds inspiration for this in declaration of *Nostra Aetate*.² He feels confident that the list suggested by the second Vatican Council, e.g. 'what is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is goodness and what is sin? What gives our sorrows and to what intent?' Each of these questions, should be developed into a theme for dialogue inviting representatives from all religions whether they have their scripture or not'. But, he

¹-Vjekoslav Bajsic, 'The Significance and Problems of Dialogue Today,' Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Vol. 9, (1972) p.33.

²- Muhammad Talbi, 'Islam and Dialogue: Some Reflections on a Current Topic', R Rousseau (ed), Christianity and Islam: The Struggling Dialogue (Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1985), p.65.

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stresses, the question should be a question for understanding and learning and not for interrogation.¹

Muhammad Tālbī also identifies prospects that are particularly important for Muslims. He thinks that Muslims' participation in dialogue with non-Muslim may yet generate another dialogue within Muslim Community at various levels. He Argues 'the dialogue could play the role of shaking Muslims out of their false sense of security and could make their hearts and ears more attentive to the message of God'. He is against those who dissociate themselves from their past heritage, what he calls the 'wealth and positive advances made by the Ummah, yet he is not in favor of clinging to the past. The precise purpose of dialogue, whatever the circumstances, is to reanimate constantly our faith, to save it from tepidity, and to maintain us in a permanent state of Ijtihād that is a state of reflection and research.²

There are three other prospects of dialogue, in Nasr's view. Dialogue 'plays an important role in buttressing our own faith'. In dialogue a person encounters an other person from an other religion 'in whom he sees the mark of authentic faith and piety and wisdom and even on the highest-level sanctity. To reject that as being untrue or unreal cause a danger for the person to lose his or her faith. Secondly, Nasr argues, there are many Christians in the west, whose 'faith has been attacked by nineteenth-century secularist philosophies or the age of enlightenment before that', but when they discover living condition 'outside of Christianity in which faith is very

¹- Ibid.,p.66.

²- Ibid.p.70.

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strong and wisdom and divine knowledge have not been lost', in such encounters they discover their 'own religious universe'. Thirdly, Nasr stresses that all religions are in a deeper sense interrelated and therefore instead of fighting against each other, for them to [discover].... Their transcendent and divine grounds or principle or origin of all religion is the best answer to those who make us of the diversity of religion in order to destroy religion which has been done by so many people like Feuerbach and Marx and a lot of grandfathers of anti religious philosophy in the last century. ¹

Wilfred Smith identifies 'understanding of the faith of other people, without weaking our own.' as important prospects of dialogue.² Swidler adds another element, that of learning. For him the primary purpose of dialogue is that each participant learns from the other so that both can change and grow."³ Milko Youroukov thinks that 'understanding' and 'learning' however are not possible without tolerance.⁴ Monika Konrad Hellwig observes that the point of the dialogue is not proselytizing but the clarification of one's perception of the position of the others, in order thereby to clarify one's perception of

¹-Ataullah Siddiqui, op.cit.p.126.

²-Wilfred Smith, *The meaning and end of Religion: A New approach to the Religious traditions of Mankind*.1963), p.14.

³-Leonard Swidler, 'Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue: The Matrix for All Systematic Reflection Today' in *towards a universal Theology of Religions*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴- Milko Youroukov, op.cit.p.67.

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one's own position and engage in more realistic and authentic relationships.¹

In spite of importance of all these prospects of dialogue, the human beings are still not able to benefit from it because the world is not fully prepared for dialogue. The present movement of dialogue is still not matured and there are many problems that are threatening its worldwide success.

III-Recognition of Religious Diversity

Islam believes that the core of the messages of all the prophets and messengers was the submission to God in the light of guidance communicated by the prophets. All prophets were Muslims (submitters to the God), and Islam is not merely the religion preached by Muhammad but was also the religion of all the true prophets of God such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus and their followers.²

Qura'an text:

﴿وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ (127) رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمَيْنِ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ (128) رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو

¹-Monika Konrad Hellwig, 'Bases and Boundaries for Interfaith Dialogue: A Christian viewpoint', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 14, (1977), p. 430.

²-See Al Qur'an 2:127-133; 3:51-52,84; 6:161-163; 10:83-84 and 90.

عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ
الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (129) وَمَنْ يَرْغَبُ عَنْ مِلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَفِهَ
نَفْسَهُ وَلَقَدْ اصْطَفَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ
(130) إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (131)
وَوَصَّى بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَى لَكُمُ
الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ (132) أَمْ كُنتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ
حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِي قَالُوا
نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَإِلَهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا
وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (51) فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ
عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ
أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَاشْهَدْ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ (52) ﴿
﴿قُلْ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ
وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَى
وَعِيسَى وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ
مُسْلِمُونَ (84) ﴿

﴿قُلْ إِنِّي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيمًا مِلَّةَ
إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ (161) قُلْ إِنِّي صَلَاتِي

وَتُسْكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (162) لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَبِذَلِكَ أُمِرْتُ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿163﴾ ﴿فَمَا آمَنَ لِمُوسَى إِلَّا ذُرِّيَّةٌ مِّنْ قَوْمِهِ عَلَى خَوْفٍ مِّنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِمْ أَن يَفْتِنَهُمْ وَإِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ لَعَالٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الْمُسْرِفِينَ (83) وَقَالَ مُوسَى يَا قَوْمِ إِن كُنتُمْ آمَنْتُمْ بِاللَّهِ فَعَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنتُمْ مُسْلِمِينَ (84)﴾ ﴿وَجَاوَزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَآئِيلَ الْبَحْرَ فَأَتْبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ رَحْنُودَهُ بَغْيًا وَعَدُوا حَتَّى إِذَا أَدْرَكَهُ الْعَرَقُ قَالَ آمَنْتُ أَنَّهُ : إِلَهٌ إِلَّا الَّذِي آمَنْتُ بِهِ بَنُو إِسْرَآئِيلَ وَأَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ (90)﴾

Muslim's recognition of legitimate religions is not limited to Christianity and Judaism only but it extends to almost all major pre-Islamic religions including Hinduism and Buddhism.¹ This recognition is based on Islamic belief that there has been no nation, which had not been visited

¹-In the 95th chapter (Surah) of Qur'an word *tin* (Fig) is mentioned as a symbol of Prophet. Manazir Ahsan Gilani, a famous Indian scholar explores that the followers of Buddha unanimously believe that he received *nirvana*, the first revelation, under a wild fig tree. He considers that the mentioning of Fig at the start of *Surah tin* is a subtle way of mentioning Buddhism in Qur'an. See Hameedullah Muhammad, *Emergence of Islam* (Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute, 1999), p.203.

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by a warner ¹so that, the different religious traditions of the world presumably had an authentic starting point.

Qura'an Text:

﴿ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِنْ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ ﴾ (24)

Religious pluralism in Islam is based on the acknowledgement of the non-believer on three distinct levels: The first is that of humanism. Islamic concept of *dīn al-fitrah* دين الفطرة express that all human being are endowed at birth by God with a true, genuine and valid for all time religion. Insofar as they are humans, this claim would be true of them that they have a *sensus communis* by the free exercise of which they can arrive at the essence of all religious truth. There is no exception in the universalism of this aspect of Islam. Islamic doctrine of natural religion is base for universal humanism.² All men are ontologically the creatures of God, and all of them are equal in their natural ability to recognize God and His law. Every human being is equipped at his birth with the knowledge that required to know God. Islamic concept of *dīn al-fitrah* دين الفطرة differentiates between natural religion and the religion of the history. The latter are either derivations from this most basic endowment; or they come from other sources such as revelation or

¹- Al Qur'an 35:24.

²- Ismail Raji al-Faruqi , 'Rights of non-Muslims under Islam', In Ismail Raji al-Faruqi Islam and Other Faiths edited by Attaullah Siddiqui (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation Mark field Conference Center,1998),p.284.

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human passion, illusion and prejudice. If this kind of religion divides mankind, natural religion unites them all, and puts all their adherents on one level. As the Prophet peace be upon him said: All men are born Muslims (in the sense of being endowed with *religio naturalis*). It is their parents (tradition, history, culture, natural as opposed to nature) that turn them into Christianity and Jews'. On the level of nature, Islam holds the believers and non-believers equal partakers of religion of God.

The second level of universalism of revelation. Islam holds that 'There are no people but God has sent them a prophet or Warner'.¹

Qura'an Text:

﴿ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِنْ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ ﴾ (24)

And that no prophet was sent but to convey the same divine message, namely, to teach that God is God and that man ought to serve him.²

Qura'an Text:

﴿ وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا ﴾ (36)

As if man has been given by nature is not enough, Islam now adds the contribution of history. In history,

¹- Al- Qur'an 35:24.

²- Al- Qur'an 16:36.

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every people have been sent a messenger, 'To teach them in their own language';¹

Qura'an Text:

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانٍ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلَّ اللَّهُ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِيَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ﴾ (4)

And none has been sent in vain.²

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطَاعَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ
ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ
لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا﴾

Every messenger conveyed and made understood identically one and the same message from God whose essence is recognition of him as God, i.e., as Creator, Lord, Master and Judge, and the service of him through adoration and obedience. All followers of religious traditions, therefore are recognized as possessors of divine revelations, each fitting its context of history and language, but all identical in their essential religious content. Muslims and non-Muslims are equal in their experience of divine communication.³ Islam considered adherence to different religious traditions legitimate. Islamic concept of universal revelation made possible a distinction between the revealed essence of a religion,

¹- Ibid.14: 4.

²- Ibid.4: 64.

³- Ismail Raji al-Faruqi , 'Rights of non-Muslims under Islam', op.cit.,p.285.

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which it shares with all other religions, and the figurizations of that religion in history. A critique of the historical by the essential, and of the understanding of both by the natural, has become possible for the first time with this breakthrough of Islam.¹

The third level of religious pluralism in Islam is its identification with historical revelation of Judaism and Christianity. It acknowledged the prophets of the two religions as genuine prophets of God, and accepted them as Islam's own. Muslims are being taught to honour their names and memories. With acceptance of the Jewish prophets and Jesus Christ, Islam reduced every difference between itself and these religions to a domestic variation, which may be due to human understanding and interpretation, rather than to God or the religion of God. By making difference between the Muslims and Jews and Christians internal it thus narrowed the gap between the adherents of these religions. This why the Muslims declare: Worthier of affiliation with Ibrāhīm (and by extension, all Hebrew prophets and Jesus Christ) are, rather those who follow his religion, this Prophet and the believers'.²

Qura'an Text:

﴿إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ
آمَنُوا وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

On the bases of unity in essence and diversity in expressions in these religions God commanded His

¹- Ibid.p.286.

²- Al- Qur'ān 3:68.

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prophet (Muhammad peace be upon him) to address them in these words: [O People of Books, let us rally together, around a noble principle common to both of us, namely, that we shall serve none but God; that we shall associate naught with Him, and shall not take one another as Lords beside God'.]¹

Qura'an Text:

﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

Islam initiated the culture of appreciation to others on their good deeds while saying: [Those who believe (The Muslims) and those who are Jews, Christians and Sabaeans-all those who believe in God and in the day of Judgment and work righteousness, shall have their reward with God. They shall have no cause for fear nor grief.]²

Qura'an Text:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَن آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ﴾

¹-Ibid.3: 64.

²-Ibid.2:62.

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The privilege of Ahlal Al-Kitāb, granted by God in the Qur'an to the Jews, Christians and Sabaeans, was extended by the Muslims to the Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists and adherents of other religions as they came into contact with them.¹ Therefore, Islam grants today all three religious privileges to adherents of all the religions of the world.²

Turkish scholar Muhammad Feteullah Gülen also highlights such ecumenical aspects of Islam in his thoughts. He has very successfully traced theological foundations of these ecumenical aspects of Islam in al-Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet (Peace be upon him). He is not only interested in communication with West on the bases of these foundations but also wants to convince the contemporary Muslims about the importance of inter faith dependence. He is saying that 'the attitude of the believers is determined according to the degree of faith. I believe that if the message is put across properly, then an environment conducive to dialogue will be able to emerge in our country and throughout the world.'³ Thus, as in every matter, we should approach this issue as indicated in the Qur'an and Prophet peace and blessings be upon him.' His point of view is that the religion of Islam, beyond accepting the formal origin of other religions and their prophets, requires Muslims to respect them as

¹-Al-Faruqi, 'Islam in Great Asian Religions (New York: Macmillan, 1975),p. 329.

²-Ismail Raji al-Faruqi , 'Rights of non-Muslims under Islam' op.,cit., p.287.

³-Gülen, Toward a Global Civilization of Love & Tolerance, p. 74.

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fundamental Islamic principles. A Muslim is a follower of Muhammad at the same time that he or she is follower of Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Other biblical prophets. Form his perspective not to believe in the biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'an is enough of a reason to place someone outside the circles of Islam.¹

Islamic concept of religious diversity provides sufficient integration, which is required for the purpose of healthy dialogue among the followers of different religions. Islamic recognition of other religions as legitimate encourages the Muslims to interact with the followers of all religion. If some one asked for conversation while declaring him right in his selection of religion, he will definitely accept such invitation. The framework of interfaith dialogue devolved on Islamic concept of religious diversity will provide a point from which every one would like to start conversation.

Iv- Freedom of Choice in Faith

The Muslim is obliged by his faith to present Islam to the non-Believer. But this obligation is to be performed with the condition of 'no compulsion in choice of faith.' No compulsion is the guarantee of the freedom to convince as well as to be convinced, of the truth. It implies that the covenanter non-Muslim is to make up his own mind regarding the merit or demerit of what is presented to him. The Qura'an forbids in unequivocal terms any

¹-see Zeki Saritoprak and Sidney Griffith, 'Fetullah Gülen and the 'People of the Book': A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue', *The Muslim World*, Vol. 95, No.3 July 2003, p.337.

tempering whatever with the process. Repeatedly, God warned His Prophet not to press the matter once he had made his presentation, absolving him of all responsibility for the decision for or against, or indecision, of his audience. Above all: [There shall be no coercion in religion. The truth is now manifesting; and so is falsehood. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has attached him to the most solid bonds.]¹

Qura'an Text:

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ
بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا
أَنْفَصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

Allah asked the Prophet:[Call them unto the path of your lord through wise argument and fair preaching; and argue them(the non-believers)with arguments yet more fair, yet more becoming.]²

Qura'an text:

﴿ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ
بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ
أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ (125)﴾

In an other verse this further clarified as: [We have revealed to you the Qur'an that you may convey it to the people. It is the truth. Whoever accepts it does so to his own credit. Whoever rejects it does so to his discredit.

¹- Al- Qura'an 2:256.

²- Al- Qura'an 16:125.